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File Code: 3420
Date: July 8, 2005

Lawrence Morrin
Regional Director
Bureau of Indian Affairs
Southwest Regional Office
P.O. Box 26567
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Dear Mr. Morrin:

On July 1, Dave Conklin of our staff met with John Waconda (Southwest Regional Office), Steve Thomas (Jicarilla Agency), and Roger Jenson (Jicarilla Agency) to evaluate a proposed FY 2006 dwarf mistletoe control/thinning project on the Jicarilla Apache Indian Reservation. Recently completed units in the FY 2005 project area (see our 3420 letter of July 9, 2004) were also briefly examined.

The proposed FY 2006 project includes three units on Pounds Mesa totaling 165 acres. Unit 29 (53 acres), Unit 15 (58 acres), and Unit 17 (54 acres) are each predominantly ponderosa pine stands with light to moderate dwarf mistletoe infestation. (A severely infected portion of Unit 29 has already been excluded from the project area, since it appears that treatment there would provide only marginal benefit). Significant amounts of healthy Douglas-fir occur, especially on the northwest-facing aspects of each unit. Most mistletoe-infected trees of commercial size were removed in a large timber sale on Pounds Mesa in 1997/98. The proposed treatment would remove infected and excess trees in the smaller size classes, and would be similar to those successfully implemented in recent years using Forest Health Protection funds.

Recently completed FY 2005 project area

Stocking would be reduced from roughly 300 to around 100 trees per acre, favoring the best available dominants and codominants. Lightly infected trees over 5" dbh may be retained where needed for stocking, but all infected trees less than 5" dbh should be cut, since few of these will grow to sawtimber size. In general, we recommend removing as much mistletoe as possible without sacrificing the best trees. Douglas-fir (where present) can be favored within infested portions of these stands. Although these are predominantly pole-size stands, we did observe a sizable (and mostly healthy) sapling thicket in Unit 15; here trees would be retained in a closer spacing (8 to 12 feet vs. 20 to 22 feet in most portions of these units).

The dwarf mistletoe management strategy recommended here, which may be appropriate for much of the Southwest, seems especially applicable at Jicarilla, where a scarcity of regeneration has occurred in recent decades. Unless there is a significant amount of young regeneration to protect, there may be little benefit in attempting to remove all infected trees. Moreover, cutting all visibly infected trees usually represents a significant sacrifice of accumulated growth.

Our examination of recently completed Units 5 and 6B (the FY 2005 project) indicated that the Tribal crew has continued to do a good job of selecting quality "leave trees." Very little *Ips* engraver beetle activity was observed in the fresh thinning slash. Some older pine mortality in these stands appeared to be a result of western pine beetle rather than *Ips*. Damage to the tops of occasional pines here and elsewhere on Pounds Mesa appeared to be, at least in part, the result of a tiger moth outbreak this past winter.

The proposed FY 2006 project should improve overall forest conditions, increase growth on selected crop trees, and reduce long-term damage from dwarf mistletoe. We again commend the Jicarilla Agency and the Jicarilla Tribe for their commitment to forest health.

Sincerely,

/s/ Debra Allen-Reid
DEBRA ALLEN-REID
New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc: Leonard Lucero, John Anhold
Steve Thomas and Roger Jensen (Jicarilla Agency), John Waconda (Southwest Regional Office, BIA)